

# A COMMUNITY COMFORTER

A multi-sensory expression of comfort and community ... Which is really a blanket

Eileen Barrett, MA Student, Graduate Liberal Studies, SFU with Patty Gazzola and Arthur Giovinazzo, Community Historians and founding members of the MPA

“What makes comfort and community and why did the MPA Drop In Centre provide it for so many who had little or no experience of it before walking in its doors?”

I hope that an exploration of this blanket, with nose, fingers or eyes will answer that question.

This work was created with memories and experiences generously shared by Community Historians, **Patty Gazzola** and **Arthur Giovinazzo**, founding members of the MPA (Mental Patients' Association), and key people in the running of the Drop-In Centre in the 1970s.

They graciously gave hours of their time to be interviewed, and were afterward badgered for information and clarification on everything from types of socks to the precise odor of wet feet. Their incredible memories and senses of humour make the colours of the story so rich.

I have also drawn on the deep wealth of words, poems, rages, announcements, articles and insights written by the incredible range of people who were the voices of the MPA newsletter, **In A Nutshell**.



*The best way to use this blanket is to sit in a comfortable chair, throw it over your lap and explore the cotton Scrabble Tile letters with your hands. Then, feel into the woolen socks, pull out a prescription pill bottle, open it and sniff. Perhaps this will evoke sensations pleasant and comforting, perhaps bemusing or off-putting. They are an attempt to recreate the aromas of the Drop-In Centre. The socks are also stuffed with paper story scrolls.*



The task of constructing the blanket was slow. Working with hands and needles, instead of a keyboard, provided an opportunity to listen Patty and Arthur's voices as I stitched, to hear them bring to life the people who were the MPA.



For some, the Drop-In Centre was a place of acceptance: people who “had your back”, a place to find a creative voice. A few visited once, and never returned. For some it was a last resort.

This comforter is stitched together. It is not perfect. Some of the squares are wonky, some of the letters stretched. But they are all connected, and without each other, have far less meaning.